

Messages in a Bottle

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Summary: Ever since Rick's father left, he wrote him letters and sent them to sea. Sugary sweet, trope-y goodness. Oneshot, Rick/Claire

Messages in a Bottle

Syrupy sweet, tropey nonsense. My first ever fanfiction, written as an adult that has better things to be doing.

Ever since Rick's father left, he wrote him letters and sent them to sea. It was usually the typical birthday or starry night update where Rick would write down all the things happening in the life of his small family; Popuri's first crush, how his mother was doing, updates on the chickens, but the letters would always end on how much Rick missed his father and how he wished that he was still there. Rick knew the letters would never actually reach his wandering patriarch, but the act of letter writing helped him cope.

As the years following his father's departure dragged on, Rick didn't need to write as much to feel better about the situation. He was growing into his own, taking care of his mother and sister, managing the chickens, leading the family. He knew that Rod was never coming back and silently accepted it.

Then he met Claire.

Meeting (and incidentally falling in love with) Claire made him realize the kind of love that would cause a man to do crazy, unthinkable things like searching for a cure that doesn't exist. After the wedding, Rick wrote a letter asking his theoretical, unanswering father if this was the need to protect that his father felt when he left. The bespectacled man detailed how Claire had changed his world and how he would never be able to be the same if anything ever happened to her. "_Dad, I think I understand now," _he

wrote.

But then, barely a season later, his understanding changed.

It was early fall and Rick was coming home to the farm that he now shared with his new wife, Claire. It was late afternoon and the sun was threatening to fall just below the horizon at any time, a chill wind blowing, a welcome feeling after such a punishingly hot summer. Rick had meant to leave earlier as he and Claire had plans to go out and celebrate a banner season on the farm, and to celebrate their first season as a married couple.

When Rick walked into the ranch house that he and Claire shared however, he called her name and got no response. Worried, he looked around until he noticed her asleep on their bed. Instantly a million thoughts raced through his head "_What if she's sick, or hurt, or something is troubling her emotionally?" _Before Rick had time to let these thoughts spiral further, he saw his wife stir.

"Hey Chickaboo," she started blurrily, "Sorry I fell asleep right after work, what time is it?"

"It's about 6:30, but that doesn't matter; are you ok?" the chicken farmer asked, looking at her with the concern born out of love. She looked absolutely worn down, pale, and sicker than he had ever seen her. He had noticed her picking at her breakfast that morning also, but hadn't thought much of it until now.

She sat up from the bed, hair poking out wildly, overalls in disarray, "Iâ€| uh, I guess so. It's nothing but some kind of seasonal cold, and I did work really hard planting the seasonal crops today, and it _did _rain yesterday," she said, obviously trying to ease his mind of worry, "It's really nothing to worry about, dear."

Rick sat down next to her and laid a large hand over her shoulder, obviously worried, "Ok, we don't have to leave tonight, I can go and get some food from Doug's and we can spend tonight in, if you want. I want you to feel better." She nodded in agreement and he left to go into town.

On his way through town, he indulged some of the concerned thoughts that were threatening to spill over. "_What if this is just like my mother, oh goddess I can't handle Claire being sick too, why Goddess why." _Sickness was something Rick feared most, not for himself, but for his loved ones. He feared for Claire, just as he was sure his father once had for Lillia, he mused.

Rick returned home later with the promised food and some ginger ale for good measure. The young couple spent the night in, Rick spending most of the night consumed with worry for Claire. She had fallen asleep again as they sat on their couch and the young man carried her to their bed.

The clock on the night stand read half past five when Rick woke up to the sound of his beloved running to their small bathroom. Judging by how cold the spot next to him in bed was, this was obviously not the first time this had happened this morning. He practically leapt out of bed and into the bathroom and found Claire sitting on the edge of their bathtub, looking stricken. He felt his heart fall.

"Oh, g-good morning," she managed to get out before burying her face in her hands. "I guess I'm not doing as well as I thought." Her muffled voice echoed slightly off the cold tile of the bathroom.

Rick knelt next to his wife and stroked her hair, trying to keep his composure and not lose himself to the worry that was quickly consuming him, "As soon as the clinic opens, I want to take you to see Dr. Trent. I want you to feel better, Claire." She again nodded silently and Rick scooped her into his arms and carried her to the bed to rest until the clinic opened.

Walking the cobblestone path to the clinic, Claire was curled into her husband's arms. Rick had insisted that he carry her there in an effort to make her feel better, and after a brief amount of protest, she gave up and allowed herself to be lifted. Rick walked briskly, ignoring the other townspeople as they passed, hoping that the gossips would ignore what they saw. He thrust the door to the clinic open to reveal a confused Elli and Trent and explained what was going on.

The next half hour was a whirlwind of tests that neither of them quite understood and the pair held hands through all of it, both keenly aware that something was very off. Dr. Trent left them alone for a few minutes to run diagnostics and check some things over. After a few moments of silence, Claire leaned her head onto Rick's arm and groaned, "I really don't know what happened, I've been sleeping more and taking care of myself ever since we got married, why is this happening." The words were semi muffled by the heavy fabric of Rick's sleeve.

Before Rick could say anything to try and relieve some of Claire's distress, Dr. Trent walked back into the room, clipboard readied with whatever diagnosis he was about to give them. Rick clung tighter to Claire's hand, a warm and reassuring gesture to ready both of them. "Ok you two, Claire is not sick." The couple turned quickly to each other, both looking dumbstruck. "Congrats, you're having a baby!"

"Wow," they breathed quietly at each other. Claire's smile looked like it spread from ear to ear and Rick felt as though his chest was going to burst from happiness. Claire listened intently to the Doctor's instructions, beaming widely the whole time. Rick pushed his glasses onto his head so he could wipe the multitudes of tears from his eyes with the sleeve of his sweater. He drew lazy circles on Claire's palm with the hand he still had wrapped around hers. When the doctor was finished and they had a follow-up appointment scheduled for a few weeks later, the young couple slowly made their way back to the small farmhouse.

"How are you feeling?" Rick questioned as they rounded the corner by the winery. Claire still looked exhausted, just as before, but her expression had turned to one of pure radiance and joy.

"Thrilled, excited, scared, surprised | tired. This happened so soon, I mean wow |. It doesn't feel real yet. Wow. I can't believe we're going to be parents, can you?" Claire's ears turned red as she leaned into her 'chicken man', her free hand placed lightly over her flat midsection. Rick squeezed her other hand and kissed the top of

her head.

"I can't believe it either, I'm going to be a _father,_" Rick winced slightly at the word, "My mom is going to be a grandmother! Claire, I'm so happy. We're having a baby!" The young man wiped more tears from behind his glasses as the two stopped at the entry to the farm that they now shared.

"This place sure is going to get a lot more lively, huh?" Claire laughed to herself, gazing out onto the fields of crops and braying livestock. "I sure hope this kid likes animals," she continued smiling widely. Claire stood up on her tip-toes to kiss her husband on the cheek as he smiled the biggest, dopiest grin imaginable.

Later in the evening, after Claire had gone to sleep (at Rick's insistence), Rick pulled out a pen and paper and began to write a letter to his father. He stared at his wife's sleeping form on the bed, his reason for living and his very breath, the one who was now carrying their child and began;

_Dad, _

_As always, I know you will never read this, but I wanted to tell you about something. I know i just sent you a letter less than a season ago, but Claire and I are expecting a child soon. I am going to be a father. How did you feel when you found out about me? When I was born? Dad I do not know how to be a father when you weren't around for me and Popuri. How am I going to do this? What if my child grows up to resent me for my choices, just as I resented you for so long. I want to love and nurture this child and for he or she to know that I would do anything for them, but I don't know how. _

Dad, I love Claire so much, I can't believe we are having a child together. It seems like a dream, but I am scared. I wish you were here. I want you to meet Claire and our child and I want to be able to ask you questions about fatherhood. I miss you.

_Godspeed, _

Rick

Rick had been so absorbed in writing that he had not noticed Claire slip from bed and stand behind him until she laid a hand on his shoulder. "Rick, are you doing ok? It's my turn to ask you."

"Ohâ€¦ ah yeah, Chicky, I'm doing great, nothing is wrong," Rick weakly lied. He hoped she wouldn't notice the letter or the tears welling up behind his already stained glasses.

Claire frowned, obviously not convinced as she moved closer and wiped tears from his freckled cheeks. "Really, Rick, what's wrong? You can tell me, we're a _team_, " She moved her hand to his head and began stroking his long hair, "I-is this about the baby?" She asked, looking concerned, her voice almost at a whisper. She moved her hands down to cover her middle.

Rick's eyebrows shot up, "Goddess, Claire, I don't want you to think for a second that I am not over the moon about this child. I love

them so much already," he moved his hands to cover hers and placed his forehead gingerly on top of them, "I'm just scared." His glasses dug a bit into his knuckles as he continued to let the words freely flow, "I don't know how to be a father, and I don't want to mess up this baby like my dad messed up with me and Popuri. I don't want to disappoint you by running on some fool's errand. I'm afraid I am going to be just like _him." _

Claire smiled lightly, gently removing her hands from under his and stroking his hair again, "Rick, you are going to be a great father. You are kind, gentle, stable, and you are more caring than any other man I have ever met. You raised Popuri into the bright, wonderful young woman she is today. This baby, the one right here," she felt Rick smile against her, "This kid is going to be so loved by both of us. You're going to be nothing like your dad. Plusâ€¦ I won't let you leave."

Rick moved his head up after placing a light kiss where his hands previously were, signalling his devotion once again for his small family. "I love you, Chicky. How did I get so lucky?" The two spent the rest of the evening drafting a new letter titled "_Promises to Our Baby" _with all the hopes, fears, and joy that they could put to words. The following morning, they walked down to the cool beach and sent the last letter to Rod, along with the list they made, out to sea. The bottle disappeared into the sunrise along with Rick's fears of parenthood. He could do this. After all, he had the best partner for the job.

End
file.